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## **Military Children's Perceptions of Parents' Frequent Missile Base Deployments**

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Deborah K. Jones entitled "Military Children's Perceptions of Parents' Frequent Missile Base Deployments." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Nursing.

Sandra P. Thomas, Major Professor

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Military Children's Perceptions of Parents' Frequent Missile Base Deployments

A Dissertation Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

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Deborah K. Jones

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To my parents who gave me life and have supported me through every assignment, I love you. You have loved and supported me even when I couldn't be home when you needed me. I

dedicate this dissertation to my father who was a lifelong educator. You taught me the joy of learning and gave me my sense of adventure. It was you that told me to keep going when I wanted to quit every time I was knocked down or was delayed, I miss you.

## **Abstract**

The impact of parental deployment on military children has been studied in the context of war but seldom examined in peacetime missions. The experience of frequent separation from a parent has not been explored using qualitative methodology. An existential phenomenological approach was used to investigate military children's perceptions of parents' frequent nuclear missile base deployments. Eight audiorecorded interviews were conducted with children ages 8 to 12 years of age, where participants were asked what it was like for them with a parent deployed to a missile field three to five consecutive days each week. Although both men and women serve in the missile field, all children in this study were describing absence of their fathers from the home. Transcribed interviews were presented in the Phenomenology Research Group (PRG) at the University of Tennessee, which contributed to the rigor of the analysis. Contextualized by the special relationship between father and child, five themes that emerged from the data: 1) Missing Dad, 2) Coping with Dad's Absence, 3) He's Really Fun, 4) Anxiety: "I'm scared when he goes on alert", and 5) Dad's Really Important to the Family. Understanding challenges from the child's perspective is important not only to health care providers caring for military children but also to other adults in the community who interact with children like teachers, school counselors, and church leaders, in order to assist the children with coping and provide resources to help meet their needs.

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## Chapter One: Overview

*“It could be a bad thing when they’re gone on special occasions like birthdays. That could be bad. Like if they, they left on like a Saturday and your birthday was on Tuesday, then he can miss it. It’s not very good. Ah, it can make you, it could hurt you. It can make you cry very bad.”*

This is Dakota, an 8-year-old boy, who discussed the difficulty of his dad being away, with facial grimacing, frowning, and shoulder shrugging capturing the emotions as he shared his experience. Dakota, like other children in the same situation, missed dad and found dealing with dad’s absence to be challenging.

This qualitative research allowed me to hear the voices of military children who discussed their father being away from home every week for work in the nuclear missile field, an assignment that requires absence for three to five 24-hour days. Phenomenological interviews provided the first-person perspectives that no questionnaire or survey research on military children ever will. First-person reporting allowed the researcher to observe emotions as the children spoke of their experiences. Research on children completed prior to this qualitative study examined data obtained from parents using surveys and questionnaires. Customarily, parents are relied upon to provide the majority of information about their children. Research has also been limited to and focused on military children of parents deployed to a combat zone. In contrast, this dissertation research focuses on children from Minot Air Force Base (AFB) in North Dakota who have parents who work out in the missile field, a peacetime mission that has not been the focus of research on military families thus far.

Minot AFB is home to Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM). ICBMs require specially trained personnel to maintain the ICBMs to ensure they are ready for use in defense of the nation.

This mission requires military personnel to be transported to the sites on over ten thousand acres around North Dakota and stay at the sites for three to five consecutive days each week. Although these members do not deploy to a combat zone, their time away from home for the nuclear mission is cumulatively greater than many deployments to a combat mission.

Separation from a military parent is not uncommon for military children. All members of a military family are familiar with at least one member going away for training exercises, deployments, temporary duty (TDY), and various other routine separations associated with their military career. These separations include operations of differing risks. For more than a decade our military has been subjected to increased operations that consisted of intense combat missions. These missions have continued and become chronic in nature with the effects felt throughout the military community. In response to this issue, research has increased and has produced a growing concern about outcomes such as increased risk for emotional, behavioral and academic difficulties in school-aged military children (Lester, Aralis, Sinclair, Kiff, Lee, Mustillo, & Wadsworth, 2016).

Research has primarily focused on military families with members in the combat zone. There is a gap in knowledge regarding the peacetime mission. The effects of parental deployment to a war zone on military dependent children are well studied. However, it is unclear if these results are generalizable to the peacetime deployment mission due to the lack of published literature. Therefore, the long-term goal of this proposed study is to close the gap in knowledge with increased understanding of impact on health and wellbeing of military children whose parents deploy to ICBM sites. Specific focus of this research is school-aged children from Minot AFB, North Dakota. Although this is a peacetime mission, these children have a story that deserves to be heard.

## **Background**

Since 1973 the military has been all-volunteer force throughout the United States Department of Defense (DoD) (Applewhite & Mays, 1996; Clever & Segal, 2013). This resulted in a growth in the number of married service members with children as well as the number of women in the military. LaGrone then introduced the “military family syndrome” in 1978. This concept stereotyped military families with an authoritarian father, depressed mother, and children who were considered out of control (LaGrone, 1978). At that time there was no research or data to validate if military life is hazardous to military families and children.

Military children are a subgroup of their own with a distinct culture. They have grown up moving around the globe following their parents with a traditional hierarchical structure and are expected to comply with the same personal and professional conduct as their parents (Yablonsky, Barbero and Richardson, 2015). This earned them the colloquial term “military brat” that was given to children who grow up in this military family and culture. They are given this name because they share the same beliefs and standards as their parents, making them a part of the military family. The most current demographics indicate the United States military is comprised of over 2.2 million volunteer service members (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015). Nearly half of these service members have children totaling over 1.2 million. Of those children approximately half of the children are younger than 12 years of age (U. S. Department of Defense, 2015). This is important because developmental changes occur during the school-age years that increase the risk for social, emotional, and behavior problems (Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, Mmari, & Blum, 2010).

This group of military children are subject to a constellation of factors that influence them, many of which are expected. Military families are highly mobile subjecting military children to frequent geographical relocations (Weber & Weber, 2005; Lester & Flake, 2013; McFarlane,

2009) and sometimes to international sites. These frequent moves include changing and making new friends, starting new relationships, in new communities and schools. They encounter challenges like having to repeat a semester of school because credits would not transfer. They also live with “complications of living with long and frequent absences of a parent and sometimes both parents” (Hall, 2011, p. 5). These short separations “account for a significant percentage of a child’s life” (Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003). Transitions that children and families experience may be considered rewarding for some, but they may also be disruptive for other children and adults (Lester & Flake, 2013).

Historically, military children have displayed great capacity for adaptation and resilience to their military lifestyle and frequent separations from their family members. Over the last decade, the operations tempo has increased in both peacetime missions and missions to a war zone. Therefore, in recent years military families have met greater challenges than ever before. Military families are also faced with multiple deployments that are greater in length than ever before and their stays at home are shorter between deployments (Park, 2011).

The effects of traditional deployment to a combat zone on families have been studied extensively over the years and lead to family adjustment problems (Ternus, 2010), distress, depression, and anxiety (Gewirtz, et al., 2011), and academic challenges as well as social, emotional, and behavioral challenges (Aranda, et al., 2011; Chandra, et al., 2009). Parents report symptoms of emotional reactivity, anxiousness, depression, somatic complaints, and aggression when compared to non-deployed military parents (Chartrand, Frank, White & Shope, 2008). Adolescents exhibit various emotions to include depression and anxiety (Huebner, Mancini, Wilcox, Grass, & Grass, 2007; Fitzsimons & Krause-Parello, 2009). To summarize, these studies found numerous effects for youth of all ages.

In response to these outcomes, many agencies identified the need for advocacy efforts to focus on and “support the need for employment, education, and wellness support for services members and their families” (Rossiter, Dumas, Wiloth, and Patrician, 2016, p. 486). The DoD expressed interest in this phenomenon and was greatly concerned about the negative effects parental separation is causing in children (U.S. Department of Defense, 2012). The American Psychological Association (APA) was charged with exploring “the mental health needs of service members and their families” (APA Presidential Task Force on Military Deployment services for Youth, Families, and Service Members, 2007). Mental health is a focus in many research studies and conditions such as depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and anxiety affect the entire family with cascading effects. Family-related mental health issues like these will not be discussed in this study in detail. However, we need to be aware of the potential complications caused by additional comorbidities.

Other notable advocacy initiatives include the “Military Child Education Coalition, Joining Forces, the National Military Family Association, the Sesame Street Talk, Listen, Connect program, Zero to Three’s Coming Together Around Military Families Initiative, and the AAP’s military Youth Medical Home and Deployment Support work group” (Lemmon & Stafford, 2014, p. 350). The American Academy of Nursing (AAN) launched the “Have You Ever Served in the Military?” campaign in conjunction with the Joining Forces campaign spearheaded by First Lady Michelle Obama and Jill Biden in 2013 (Rossiter, Dumas, Wilmoth, & Patrician, 2016). This initiative did not encompass active duty, Reserve, and National Guard families therefore, the Military and Veterans Health Expert Panel of the AAN “proposed to close this gap through the I Serve 2 initiative that would highlight the unique healthcare needs of children whose parents have served in the military” (Rossiter, Dumas, Wilmoth, & Patrician, 2016, p. 485). This was to urge clinicians

providing health care to children to ask every patient if they had a parent that ever served in the military.

### **What is Known**

In past years military families were identified as resilient families because moving is part of the military culture and being temporarily separated from the active duty service member is a component that moving families endure during a military career (Park, 2011). However, focus groups in a study by Chandra, Martin, Hawkins, & Richardson (2009) indicate family resiliency is decreasing due to extended and multiple deployments causing frequent separation of children from parents. Horton (2005) suggests that programs and resources currently in place to support military members and their families do not offer help with adaptation.

A systematic review of the research on the impact of deployment on military families with young children was completed in 2015 by Trautmann, Alhusen, and Gross. Their review of 26 studies focused on mental health problems in military families with young children ages 0 to 5 years. Results of the review “provide preliminary evidence that deployment is associated with more stress and mental health problems in parents and young children, increased use of mental health care by spouses/partners and children, and greater likelihood of child maltreatment” (Trautmann, Alhusen & Gross, 2015, p. 675). They found a number of methodological weaknesses from their review of the studies. These limitations included having “small racially and ethnically homogeneous samples, relying almost exclusively on parent report for measuring study outcomes, lack of specificity on what constitutes the deployment and post deployment periods” (p. 675). Exclusive parent reporting is the most significant among the weaknesses. This adds to the significance of this qualitative study to interview school-age children.

Lack of what constitutes deployment and post deployment periods is difficult because throughout the research deployment definitions and phases have changed. Until 2005, deployment was discussed in five phases 1) predeployment, 2) deployment, 3) sustainment, 4) redeployment, and 5) post-deployment (Pincus, House, Christensen & Alder, 2005; Fitzsimmons & Krause-Parello, 2009). The definition of deployment changed again to include peacetime operations (Card et al., 2011). Peacetime operations are those missions like the missile mission where members are performing their duties for extended days away from home but not in a hostile environment. In recent research, the word transposition was used to combine and define the sustainment and redeployment phase of the deployment cycle. The adaptation of the military family left behind consists of moving forward, taking on new roles by family members, and connecting with peer families (Yablonsky, Barbero, & Richardson, 2015).

Cozza, Haskins, and Lerner (2013) suggest that many types of deployments are cyclic and require families to endure the challenges time and time again. This resonates with school-age children in this research study as they experience weekly separation from one or both parents throughout the year which is an example of deployments.

The amount of research literature on the effects of parental deployment to a combat zone on children is voluminous. However, deficits are noted. As discovered in the systematic review by Trautmann, Alhusen and Gross (2015), the vast majority of studies used a quantitative method of inquiry and surveys or questionnaires were parent reported. In research specifically on separation from parents, parents reported that children exhibit anxiety or depressive symptoms, as well as sleep difficulties, poor school performance, or behavioral problems. These emotional occurrences and symptoms are not completely captured by surveys and questionnaires. Also, few quantitative



studies gathered information directly from the children. Even fewer studies used a qualitative method and these too were mostly parent reported.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Children and family reactions to separation vary along a continuum. Many military children and families adjust and do well (Cozza, Haskins, & Lerner, 2013) as opposed to results from numerous studies that identified children having difficulties during parental deployment to a war zone (Chandra, et al., 2009; Chandra, Martin, Hawkins, & Richardson, 2009; Chartrand, et al., 2008; Flake, et al., 2009). Considering the increased operations tempo (UPTempo) with multiple combat zone deployments seen in the last 14 years, many military family members have come to expect separations. However, what is not expected, nor is fully understood, is the peacetime deployment activity, such as that seen in the ICBM missile communities. Commanders have argued that the number of days a parent is away to maintain ICBMs is cumulatively much greater than the time one spends away from home for deployment to a war zone each year. Stressors at this nuclear base are different and not related to a hazardous combat mission, instead stressors are due to the peacetime mission requirements; however, these children like other children may react differently to events. Military research continues to shift from the active duty member to families and children. Results from numerous studies resulted in President Obama highlighting the “need to ensure that military children develop in healthy and productive ways” when he declared the care and support of military families a priority for national security policy (Clever & Segal, 2013, p. 14). Also, there are concerns for the lack of national efforts that focus on identification of “the unique healthcare needs of military children as it pertains to parental deployments or impact of military service” (Rossiter, Dumas, Wilmoth & Patrician, 2016, p. 486)

## **Personal Reflection**

The starting point for this research developed through reflection on my own experiences through my military assignments. I am an Air Force nurse and a pediatric nurse practitioner (PNP) and I've spent the majority of my career in pediatrics. I was a flight nurse where my job was to care for wounded warriors returning home after being injured in the combat zone. It was during this time I began to think about the children of these members and how their lifelong injuries would impact their families. My journey and concept for this research study began when I was a flight nurse in Germany in the initial stages of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2001. The injuries of military members left a lasting impression on me. My entire career until that time had been taking care of children of military members. The stark representation of the years to come for these children of wounded military members left memories that continued until I became aware of the struggles these children share as I cared for them in the clinic years later as a PNP. I saw and treated children in the pediatric clinic at Minot AFB. My patient enrollment was from birth to 18 years of age. I saw similar symptoms in these children that mirrored the children of members deployed to a combat zone. What is common to both missions is the children and families also live the life of their active duty member with great sacrifice and commitment to the mission.

In addition to the ICBM mission, I also found living in North Dakota challenging so I imagine other military families do as well. Winters are long, really long and, in fact, last eight to nine months. Any precipitation falling in September through May is snow and wind is the only thing that is constant. The temperatures for a good chunk of winter drop to less than 30 degrees for many weeks and go as low as 60 below zero. Despite the austere conditions this military base has been strategically placed to support national security. This mission is considered a peacetime mission however, it is not known if the operational mission or combined challenges are affecting

military children and families. When children are experiencing physical or mental health issues, parents are understandably worried, which may impact the parents' ability to fulfill their military readiness mission, peacetime or in combat.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to describe military children's perceptions of parents' frequent deployments to the missile field. Qualitative research is about discovery and children living the nuclear mission have a story to tell. This led me to the phenomenological approach to studying a military child's experience. An understanding grounded in the perceptions of military children who are willing to describe their unique challenges forms a basis for intervention for practice. This study proposes to close this knowledge gap with a phenomenological study to gain the school-age child's perspective of the meaning of parental deployment. The specific aim of this qualitative study is to comprehensively examine the phenomenon of frequent separation from parent(s) as perceived by military children of parents deploying to the missile field. My specific interests are, "How do children whose parents deploy for multiple days at a time each week perceive the deployment?" and "Are the perceptions of the children of parents with missile deployments similar to what is reported in the literature for children of combat deployed parents?" Strengths of the study are (a) focusing on the understudied phenomenon of separation from parent(s) as well as (b) utilizing an existential phenomenological approach to conduct interviews with children versus collecting information from the parent via structured questionnaires that measure pre-selected variables. The current study follows Creswell's (2014) recommendation, "qualitative researchers focus on only one concept" (p. 135). The phenomenological method is used to discover the meaning of the recurrent parental separations to children ages 8-12 while generating an in-depth description

of the concept of separation from parents as perceived by the child. The proposed methodology allows children to describe their lived experience, in first person, of separation from parents.

### **Research Question**

Little is known about the effects of deployment to peacetime missions on school-age children. Clearly, there is further need to understand the experience of this phenomenon. The question posed in this research is “What is the perception of military children of their parents’ frequent deployments to the nuclear missile field?”

### **Philosophical Framework**

The qualitative approach selected to develop an understanding of the military child’s experience is existential phenomenology, derived from the perspective of philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Phenomenology focuses on the essence of a lived experience and embraces complexities and existential matters (Wijngaarden, van der Meide, & Dahlbert, 2017). Qualitative research aims to address phenomena that might otherwise be non-researchable. Phenomenology is both a method of inquiry to study essences of a phenomenon and a philosophy placing essences back into existence (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). It is used to seek description of experience and gain an understanding of experience. The specific procedures used in this study, inspired by Merleau-Ponty, were developed at the University of Tennessee.

As discussed earlier, children that have experienced deployment of a military parent may display a variety of emotions. Within existential phenomenology, emotions are viewed as important phenomena to study and as diverse ways of “being-in-the-world” (Thomas, 2005). Thomas discusses her experience of transitioning from quantitative to qualitative research because women’s anger when measured with questionnaires did not capture the interpersonal context in which anger was generated. She found that the quantitative study she completed had missed an

important dimension of experienced anger (Thomas, 2005). Anxiety, depression, sadness, distress, and aggression are all forms of emotion that were found in recent research on military children (Rossiter, Dumas, Wilmoth, & Patrician, 2016; Lemmon & Stafford, 2014; Yablonsky, Barbero, & Richardson, 2015) but greater understanding from the first-person perspective should be obtained from the children's own reports of these feelings. Children's perceptions change as they travel through developmental stages providing another reason to ask children to describe their experience. This approach ascertains the children's perceptions of their experience and allows them to describe in detail for us to better understand their challenges of military life.

Perception, according to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, this method affords a direct experience of the events, objects, and phenomena of the world (Sohn, Thomas, Greenberg & Pollio, 2017). Therefore, a phenomenological study is appropriate to gather data or information from the children's perspective regarding their experience of separation from a parent as a military child. The phenomenological approach is "compatible with nursing's values and philosophical foundations" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 10). Knowledge may be gained without observation and measurement required of the typical empirical approach (Rodgers, 2005). Researchers seek to discover the essence of the individual subject's experience as revealed through interviews, stories, or observations. This requires that children be interviewed to provide their perspective about a parent who is away from home every week to support the nuclear mission.

### **Significance of the Problem**

While the effects of parental separation due to deployment to a combat zone have been recognized in numerous studies, current understanding of the effects of parental separation due to a peacetime mission is lacking. Teachers, health care providers, and the DoD agree that the well-being of military children and families is a far-reaching concern for the nation and is a national

security priority (Cozza, Haskins, & Lerner, 2013; Masten, 2013). Families and children react differently to stress and frequent separation of a family member. It is important for health care professionals to understand how frequent separations impact children in all circumstances. Many families transition to the civilian sector every year and require integration into schools, medical care, childcare programs, faith-based organizations, and life as civilians. More than 90 percent of the two million children who have experienced deployment attend civilian schools and participate in social organizations in civilian communities (Wadsworth, 2013). It is common that military children receive care from the military healthcare system but many children also receive their primary care from civilian providers (Siegel & Davis, 2013) especially Guard and Reserve family members.

School-age children and adolescents are a major concern as they are the most vulnerable age group of children. Life changes are difficult for this population because they occur during a critical and rapid stage of social and emotional development, which is challenging in the most supportive and stable of environments (Chandra, Martin, Hawkins, & Richardson, 2009). When interacting with children and adolescents it is important clinicians recognize the wide range of physical, cognitive, and emotional development that occurs during this period of life. It is especially important that pediatric providers inquire about family stressors such as separation and other events that temporarily or permanently change family structure. Efforts have been made over the last decade to raise awareness and educate non-uniformed pediatric providers regarding the challenges of military life (Lemmon & Stafford, 2014). Efforts to build strong, effective military families require developing a more precise understanding of how children experience the absence of a military family member during frequent deployments and/or separations. This can be accom-

plished with phenomenology studies to gain an understanding from the school-age child's perspective. In the conclusion of a recent quantitative study the researchers indicated, "youth self-reports may be another way to understand psychosocial stressors and symptoms in the military youth culture" (Aranda, Middleton, Flake, & Davis, 2011, p. 406). A phenomenology study provides an opportunity to learn valuable information to fill this gap.

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are easy to postulate when familiar with the characteristics and events of the study. The assumptions for this study are as follows.

1. Military school-age children may be struggling with parental separation.
2. Military school-age children will discuss their experience.

### **Limitations**

The main limitations will be summarized in the following statements.

1. The sample was limited to military school-aged children from one Air Force base in the geographical location of the northern Midwest or northern tier as the military indicates. One site and population can limit transferability.
2. Generalizability of the findings to a population is not expected due to using the phenomenological method, which focuses on careful description of lived experiences by military children.
3. All children in this study had their father as the military member.

### **Key Terms**

Assignment – When a military member or family moves to a new base to start new job duties this is considered an assignment

Deployment – When a military member is away from home to perform his or her duty in peacetime or war.

Military children – Children that have one or both parents who are active duty, guard, or reserve military.

Missile site – Undisclosed site that houses an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) that is secured by the tightest measures possible.

School-age children – According to Dixon and Stein (2006) school-age children are divided into early childhood (5 to 7 years), middle childhood (8 to 10 years), and late childhood (11 to 12 years). Middle and late childhood will be the focus of this study.

### **Chapter Summary**

Parental separation is the phenomenon that is experienced by military families and children caused by absence of a deployed family member. The mission to maintain ICBMs is unique and military families face many challenges and stressors inherent to this lifestyle. Despite the increasing number of research studies that have focused on the effects of deployment on children, little is known about the effects of deployment to a peacetime mission on children. Although some families react well to these challenges and stressors, the chronic deployments are taking a toll on many families causing a heightened sense of insecurity to include family, school, and the military community. To address this concern, a phenomenological study to interview children is required to understand their perception of parental absence during a peacetime mission. Although many research studies propose interventions, understanding the experience from a child's perspective is needed to develop appropriate interventions. The goal of this study is to close the gap in knowledge of understanding the lived experience of school-aged military children at Minot AFB.



## Chapter Two: Literature Review

The initial survey of the literature for this research included the following databases: CINAHL, Medline/PUBMed, PsycINFO, Google Scholar, Social Work Abstracts, and Web of Science. Additional research articles were retrieved from reference lists in eligible articles. Key terms included: *military deployment, parental separation and children, military children, children affected by war, and children respond to parents at war*. My location in the military changed so I narrowed my focus to operations other than war and I used additional terms to include: *children and separation, school-age children and separation, and military school-age children*. To compare military children who are separated from their parents to other experiences where children are separated from their parents I used the search terms *children of divorce and children of incarcerated parents*. Journal articles were included if they were research studies, literature reviews, or opinion articles examining the effects of parental separation on children and were in English. There was no limit on the date because research on military members extends over the past 80 years. Literature was found in nursing, medicine, mental health, education, public health, and social work professional journals. Government documents relevant to the military were also included in the review.

There are conflicting opinions about doing a literature review before conducting a qualitative study. The concern is that prior studies might influence researchers' conceptualization of the phenomena under study (Polit & Beck, 2012). Consistent with the approach selected for this study (Thomas & Pollio, 2002), heightened awareness of the researcher's own assumptions and prior knowledge is actually desirable rather than disadvantageous. Therefore, I did a literature review to learn what is known about my area of interest in hopes it would provide me a greater awareness of issues for this study. It is important to understand what it means to be a military child and what

makes them different than civilian children. My literature review also explored reasons children are separated from a parent as well as studies on the effects of all types of deployment on military children.

### **Military Children**

Countless examples of military children's emotional and behavioral disturbances abound in the literature. Effects of parental separation on military children vary among the psychosocial developmental stages causing individualized responses. Preschool children may show difficulty with toilet training, thumb sucking, refusing to sleep alone, and become more emotionally attached. School-age children may have difficulty learning, may focus on their parent being absent for a special event like a birthday, and may act out with emotions and behavior. They may have depressive symptoms as well as sleep disturbance, anxiety, anger, or defiance (Bursch & Lester, 2011). These symptoms may be indicators of grief and loss (Fitzsimons & Krause-Parello, 2009). Adolescents can have an identity crisis and may be irritable, bully others, and demonstrate attention-seeking behaviors. This age group may withdraw from friends, school, and other activities. Risk for alcohol and drug use is also of concern for this age (Fitzsimons & Krause-Parello, 2009). For the purpose of this study I focused on school-age children.

Previous research on issues in the military focused on military veterans but since that time, awareness of the challenges faced by military families and children continues to grow (Kelley & Jouriles, 2011; Trautmann, Alhusen. & Gross, 2015). I chose to examine the military school-age child's life experience and address a gap in knowledge. Prior to proceeding I think it is important to discuss the military culture. In addition to the challenges military children face, they are expected to follow the same rules and regulations as their military parent. This behavior is slightly different than their civilian counterparts and important to understand.

## **Military Culture**

Military lifestyle and culture can seem foreign and it “underscores the complexity of the overlapping contexts in which military families live” (Greenfield, 2009, p. 70). Things that are unique and define the military as a unique culture are “language, a code of manners, norms of behavior, belief systems, dress, and rituals” (Reger, Etherage, Reger, & Gahm, 2008, p. 22). The military also has cultural, religious and ethnic diversity further making it a culture in its own right. The values, traditions, norms, and perceptions govern how military members think, communicate, and interact within the confines of the military as well as the civilian sector. A military member is expected to behave in an exemplary manner whether at work or out of uniform. In addition, those who wear the military uniform share common beliefs and standards that set them apart from civilian populations.

Every culture has different beliefs that define the culture and military members are no different. Beliefs that are common to the Air Force center around the mission, which requires personal sacrifices. Choosing this lifestyle comes with an understanding of mobility and sacrifice by the whole family including children. Military traditions are often handed down to family members to include dependent children. It is important they understand traditions in which their parents participate. Military children are faced with different challenges when interacting with civilian children. When one person joins the military, “the whole family serves” (Park, 2011, p. 65) creating unique situations children are required to adjust to. Parents are responsible for the behavior of their children who are held to the same standard. This can be stressful to many children and families. One of the most documented stressors to military families is deployment. Deployment is the most researched concept regarding military members and their families. It is important to know what deployment is and what challenges it creates.

## **Deployment**

Historically, deployment was defined in relation to operational war assignments like World War I, World War II, and Vietnam. Since September 11, 2001, military personnel and their families have endured challenges and stressful conditions that are unprecedented in recent history, including unrelenting operational demands and recurring deployments in combat zones. Having a parent deployed to a war zone for an indeterminate period is among the more stressful events a child can experience (Murray, 2002).

Traditionally, this type of deployment was defined in relation to the combat zone as the location where the military member is away from home for a determined period of time to a high-risk combat operation. They were short in duration of three months and in recent years they have extended to one year or longer. This resulted in the military member being separated from family members for extended periods of time. The traditional deployment cycle consists of five phases, as described by Pincus, House, Christensen, and Alder (2005) and Fitzsimmons and Krause-Parello (2009). Challenges are different during each phase of deployment. The traditional five phases are as follows:

1. Pre-deployment begins when the military member is notified of upcoming deployment and details surrounding this separation.
2. Deployment begins the moment the military member departs and continues through the first month away from home.
3. Sustainment begins at the start of the second month of deployment and continues through the fifth month.
4. Redeployment begins with the month before the deployed member is scheduled to arrive home.

5. Post-deployment begins the moment the military member arrives home from deployment.

As time has passed the definition of deployment changed and was defined as “the strategic movement and positioning of military forces from a home base to an area of military combat or peacetime operations” (Card, et al., 2011, p. 508). This means military operations have changed and become more diverse, including areas of conflict and peacetime locations. Even though deployment now included peacetime deployments, they still followed the same five phases. Then in 2015 researchers continue to change the meaning as the US Department of Defense defined deployment as “the rotation of forces into and out of an operations area” (Yabolonsky, Barbero, & Richardson, 2015). This definition is more inclusive and includes the nuclear operational mission of the peacetime mission. They also decreased the phases to four and are as follows.

1. Pre-deployment is simply getting ready for the active duty member to leave.
2. Deployment is the phase where the active duty member is away from home.
3. Transposment is moving forward while the active duty member was gone. Moving forward is to maintain a normal life, using multiple coping modalities.
4. Post-deployment is the return or transition and reintegration of the active duty member back into the family.

Peacetime deployment may consist of being away from home for a few days to months. Whether this time away from home follows the traditional five-phase deployment cycle is not known. Although military members may not be deployed to areas of war, their job duties may require extended time away from home. Recent studies indicate high job involvement, long hours, and job-related stress are associated with family conflict and can have a direct effect on adjustment

of children of deployed military service members (Card, et al., 2011). This job description is consistent with members maintaining ICBMs in North Dakota. These members deploy to undisclosed locations 24-hours a day for five consecutive days as their primary job duty. The days vary weekly creating further challenges for families.

It is suggested that deployments can precipitate normative, tolerable, and toxic stressors. Noncombat deployments are typically normative stressors. More severe deployments to a war zone are tolerable if adequate support is available. However, deployments to a war zone or extended periods of time away from home become chronic in nature. The long time away from home resonates within the cyclical deployments to ICBM sites, where the chronic time a parent is away from home may become toxic and result in “emotional and behavioral consequences for children and families” (Esposito-Smythers, Wolff, Lemmon, Bodzy, Swenson, & Spirito, 2011, p. 498). For the purpose of this paper, deployment will be discussed in relation to a peacetime deployment where members go to ICBM sites up to five consecutive days each week.

How children view deployment depends on their coping process. Many children address stressful situations with ease however, others have varying degrees of difficulty dealing with stressful situations. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) indicate that coping is a process rather than a personal trait. It is important to acknowledge that as children grow and develop, their coping processes change. Understanding the emergence of coping abilities during this period of growth is critical in advancing the understanding of how children adapt to stress (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen, & Wadsworth, 2001). It is unclear if children in peacetime deployments have better coping skills.

All children experience separation from one or both parents many times during their childhood and adolescent years. I wondered what literature would say about civilian children and their

separation from one or both parents. Research indicates children in other situations deal with stressful life events much the same. When separation is more permanent as in divorce or incarceration it is perceived by children to be one of their most stressful life events (Davies & Cummings, 1994). The following paragraphs discuss research findings for different types of settings.

### **Divorce**

Divorce is a life event where children experience separation from a parent that may be permanent or they may have frequent visits. Youth experience parental divorce with 40 to 50 percent of married couples divorce each year (American Psychological Association, 2017). Research on school-aged children of divorced parents indicate they can be moody, aggressive and display behavior of acting out, and may feel rejected and deceived by the absent parent. School performance has been shown to decrease in many school-age children (Japel, Tremblay, Vitaro, & Boulerice, 1999; Pagani, Boulerice, Tremblay, & Vitaro, 1997; Roseby & Johnston, 1998). In studies on adolescents, research found that anger and confusion led to relationship problems, substance abuse, decreased school performance, inappropriate sexual behavior, depression, and aggressive behavior (Emory & Laumann-Billings, 1998; McCormick & Kennedy, 2000; Neher & Short, 1998). In all the studies children frequently had psychosomatic symptoms. These symptoms, and other problems that children of divorce display, make separation an important process to understand as a health care provider of children. There were no qualitative studies on children's experience of divorce.

### **Incarceration**

Several studies examined children of incarcerated parents and indicate adverse effects and detrimental consequences for children with an absent parent due to imprisonment. Imprisonment of a parent contributed to antisocial behavior and increased crimes in their offspring. Children of

incarcerated parents have multiple risk factors for adverse outcomes including delinquency, and imprisonment tends to affect children over and above other types of separation experiences (Murray & Farrington, 2005). Children of incarcerated parents were also at risk for poor academic outcomes, substance abuse, truancy, and school failure (Poehlmann, Dallaire, Loper, & Shear, 2010). Yet in another study researchers found that children of incarcerated parents experienced high levels of stress and trauma related to the new situation. They also experienced hypervigilance, psychosomaticizing, and guilt consistent with post-traumatic stress syndrome symptoms to the degree that it impaired daily functioning (Bocknek, Sanderson, & Britner, 2009). Of the studies examining the effects of parental separation on children of incarcerated parents or caregiver, one was quantitative, one literature review, and one mixed methods study in which school-age children of prisoners were interviewed as part of the study. Methods of inquiry were also similar with minimal qualitative studies exploring the child's experience from their perspective.

### **Theories in Military Research**

Theory does not drive a qualitative research study however; all research is anchored by concepts and theory. Research on military families has been rooted in family stress theory. Asking people to describe a situation or experience is at times more fruitful than having them complete surveys or questionnaires. Accepting this information is critical in a process that is essential to studying family stress management (Boss, 2002). Boss began her research with military families and disaster victims. She focused on military families that had a family member missing in action or a prisoner of war.

Researchers are finding family and individual perceptions and meanings to be useful information in treating distressed families (Boss, 2002). A concept that is central to Boss' conceptual approach of family stress management is boundary ambiguity. Her theory has been used in many



of the studies on the effects of deployment on children and families. One tenet of Boss's theory is that the definition of family has changed. Her definition is quite different than the traditional definition of an isolated nuclear unit. She defines family as a "continuous system of interacting persons bound together by processes of shared rituals and rules even more than biology" (Boss, 2002, p. 18). She views the family structure as a system that changes when needed to adapt and survive in changing times. This resonates with military families, as family dynamics change and change is the only constant for families moving about the globe.

Boundary ambiguity occurs when a member of the family is absent and those at home are required to take on a new role of the absent family member and there is confusion regarding the roles. She discusses how boundary ambiguity immobilizes the family structure and boundaries are no longer maintainable. Boundary ambiguity is also part of normal everyday life in moderate amounts. For military families this would vary due to the different requirements of members however, the degree of boundary ambiguity depends on the family perception of the event. Boundary ambiguity can be functional or dysfunctional. Tolerance of boundary ambiguity varies from family to family and some tolerance is a sign of a mature and healthy family (Boss, 2002). This is a plausible concept of use in future research. Now to look at what research has been conducted on military children.

### **Military Research**

Since World War II, research predominantly examined the active duty member. During the 1970s counseling and psychological research described a "military family syndrome" (Clever & Segal, 2013). This was based on research results that indicated military children have more behavior problems and psychological disorders than civilian children. This syndrome has been refuted

by further research. Recent research indicates that much of it was methodologically flawed and calls were made for better designed and long term studies (Lester & Flake, 2013).

Early studies indicate children experience distress, depression, and anxiety that is associated with parental deployment and greater distress associated with longer deployment (Jensen, Martin, & Watanabe, 1996). Sameroff and Haith (1996), as cited in Gewirtz, Erbes, Polusny, For-gatch, and Degarmo (2011), indicate transitions to be problematic for school-aged children, “who are developing social networks through school and neighborhood” (p. 57). The ways children and adolescents adjust to challenges during deployment depend on their developmental level (Murray, 2002). Each of Erikson’s stages of social and emotional development is considered a psychosocial crisis, and each crisis demands resolution before a child can reach the next stage of development (Fitzsimons & Krause-Parello, 2009). Little is understood about how children adjust to challenges as they move through each stage of deployment. Murray (2002) like others, indicates that school age children whose parents are away at war experience sadness, grief, and anger. They also experience difficulty sleeping that results in irritability, poor attention span, and difficulty learning (Fitzsimons & Krause-Parello, 2009). In addition, results from a study by Stadelmann, Perren, Groeben, and von Klitzing (2010) indicate that girls and boys did not differ in terms of emotional symptoms.

In a quantitative study Kelley (1994) examined the impact of long-term, military-induced separations. Data were collected by a parent report and children were between five and 13 years of age. Data were gathered during pre-deployment, mid-deployment, and post-deployment. Results indicated that parent separation was disruptive for families with early school-age children. Behavior in both boys and girls improved with the return of the family member from deployment.

This study also compared behavior of children with a family member deployed to a high-risk operation, versus children with a family member deployed to a peacetime mission. Children in the peacetime deployment exhibited few problems over time.

In another quantitative study conducted in the 1990's, researchers compared the psychosocial functions of children with their mother absent to children who were separated from their father (Applewhite & Mays, 1996). The study's hypothesis was not supported, but substantive significance was established regarding maternal versus paternal separation. Results indicated that children who experienced maternal separations were not more adversely affected than children separated from their fathers. The children separated from their mothers did not develop less effective psychosocial functioning than children separated from their father.

After the 1990's, focus turned to family members and more recently on the children of service members. Huebner, et al. (2007) conducted a study interviewing focus groups in five different states to examine how adolescents cope while a parent is deployed. This study had participants whose parents were from all varied branches of the military. The goal of this study was to examine four categories of data: (a) overall perceptions of uncertainty and loss, (b) boundary ambiguity, (c) changes in mental health, and (d) relationship conflict. The adolescents in this study exhibited various emotions associated with the uncertainty of not knowing what would happen during the deployment and how it would affect them. Depression and anxiety were common, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the adolescents during the deployments, adding confusion to their lives. Additionally, increases in family emotional intensity caused a change in the parent-child relationship; study participants provided clear examples of nondeployed parents left at home lashing out at them in anger. This is concerning however, there is no further evidence of additional

studies regarding mental health of parents at home. Emotional intensity regarding parents was not addressed in this current study.

This focus on behavior change in children continued in the study by Lester, et al., (2010) and they indicated the number of months deployed and away from home predicted child depression and externalizing behaviors but not internalizing behaviors (Lester, et al., 2010). Results also suggested “children can have complex reactions to multiple phases of the deployment cycle” (p. 317). This study also showed differences among the genders. Girls had increased externalizing symptoms during deployment compared to boys who had “difficulty adjusting to reduced autonomy and increased structure when the deployed parent returns” (p. 318).

How children aged 11 to 17 years of age managed across social, emotional and academic domains was the focus of a quantitative study by Chandra, Lara-Cinisomo, et al. (2009). Families that participated were from all various branches of the armed forces. This was a mixed methods study with a twofold purpose that included: (a) examining the health and well-being of children from the perspective of the child, and (b) determining whether deployment experiences varied depending on the number of months of deployment. This was the only qualitative study found to include children. The qualitative portion was completed by two interviews, one with the caregiver at home and the other with the child. The interview with the child took close to 20 minutes. The results indicated that children respond differently to stress based on their age. This is consistent with growth and development. Outcomes of interests that were measured included: (a) academic engagement, (b) anxiety, (c) behavior problems, (d) emotional difficulties, (e) peer functioning, (f) family functioning, and (g) mental health of the caregiver. A strong link was established between caregiver mental health and child well-being, as defined by the presence or absence of deployment-related difficulties. The emotional health of the parent left at home and their stress levels

also affected adolescents' ability or inability to adapt. In addition, deployment-related difficulties were greater for families that experienced longer periods of parental absence.

Parental stress was found to be a contributing factor to behavioral and emotional problems among school-aged children aged five to 12 years of age with military parents (Flake, Davis, Johnson, & Middleton, 2009). Findings from this quantitative study indicated that clinically significant parental stress correlated with scores indicative of high risk on children's Pediatric Symptom Checklists. Parental stress was the most significant predictor of problematic behavior in children in this study.

In another quantitative study, the aim was to investigate the relationship between parental military deployment and symptoms for psychosocial morbidity of youth using self-reported checklists completed by both parents and children during routine physicals (Aranda, Middleton, Flake, & Davis, 2011). Results from this study indicated children with a deployed parent demonstrated significantly more symptoms of psychosocial morbidity than children without a currently deployed parent. Children with a deployed parent were "at risk" for emotional and behavioral problems. At the time of this study, it was the first to evaluate psychosocial morbidity.

While there is plenty of research on the effects of deployment on children, in more recent studies there has been an effort to examine building stronger community support, policy and programs (Lester & Flake, 2013). This article reviewed existing research to develop a framework to help guide a national research agenda and develop a public health approach. It also reviewed research within each military branch as well as current research on the effects of deployment to a combat zone on children. The authors too agreed that development contributed to how children react and that school-aged children and adolescents are more aware of "their parents' duties and the dangers of war" (p. 124). This age group showed more symptoms of anxiety during deployment

as well as post deployment. Their review also found that school-age children struggle with peer relationships, stress, emotional and behavioral problems, depression and suicidal thoughts. One interesting finding was that this age group was more likely to use drugs and alcohol. These authors discussed the need for more prevention, public health policy, and the need for “better designed, longer-term studies as well as more rigorous evaluation of existing and future support programs” (p. 121). They stated studies with larger representative samples would help identify how stresses of military life affect family functioning.

Other authors examined what has been learned from past research and speculated about where to go from here. Kudler & Porter (2013) indicate that a public health approach to harness community strengths should be a focus. These authors state that most Americans are isolated from military families. This was my first time seeing this position articulated in the literature because based on my experience military families are imbedded in communities at most locations through schools, social programs, and housing developments, therefore refuting that most Americans are isolated from military families. The authors did not indicate where they retrieved this information. They believe there is a need to look beyond the clinical care in order to define interactions to support well-being. These authors believe the nation needs “clinical systems for military families that understand military culture, ask about military histories, and consider the health implications of deployment as a routing component of care” (p. 169). They also suggest clear policies for teachers, doctors, pastors, and other professionals that interact with military children and families. These authors also looked at programs already in place that support the military. Many of the programs discussed included support for families dealing with Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD), mental health issues, and resiliency. I am active duty and provide medical care to pediatric patients every day, and I have not heard of several of the programs discussed. This is concerning about

how families are to locate information about these types of programs if the providers caring for their patients do not have knowledge of them to pass on. This may be a reason the programs in place are not as effective as they could be because they are not reaching an important population that could benefit from their services.

Masten (2013) suggests that focus on stress and resilience in military families can help us create policies that promote positive development. She states that developmental and cultural contexts are important for good adaptation for individual children. She also states the greatest investments in helping out children and military families are “stable access to high-quality early child care and education” (p. 203). She suggests longitudinal research to follow families over time to produce the best information for finding what works among military families. Throughout most of the studies stress both for parents and children was a common theme.

A recent publication was a systematic review of the vast amount of research completed that evaluated the effects of deployment on parenting and children and adolescents. Trautmann, Alhusen, and Gross (2015) evaluated 42 studies. Of those, seven were qualitative in which all used individual or focus group interviews to gather data. All interviews were with adults, either members that had deployed or spouses or care giver. The rest of the studies reviewed were quantitative. All study findings provide consistent evidence that military deployments “have significant negative effects on parenting and young children’s well-being” (p. 673). They also indicate that these effects could have long-term implications for the children’s mental health and well-being. As more and more studies are completed the researchers are focusing on younger children, less than seven years of age.

## **Chapter Summary**

Although many research studies have been conducted to examine the effects deployment to a war zone have on children, little is known about the effects of a peacetime mission nor what the experience is like for a school-age child. Additional research is needed to examine the effects on children in peacetime missions. Military children are a unique subculture and face challenges unique to the military. Separation from a parent due to military requirements results in changes to family dynamics and is a stressful event for children. Research indicates that military families and children are becoming less resilient to military life. Researchers also gave many suggestions on what can be done to minimize the impact of deployed family members however, there are no studies indicating interventions are working. With this evidence, it is imperative that school-age military children share their experience from their own words in a phenomenological study. Results will provide health care providers with a better understanding of the experience and how to develop strategies to improve their lives. Without knowledge of the military child's experience, clinicians will lack an accurate understanding of the experience preventing development of interventions to minimize the effects of deployment on their lives. This study seeks to explore and understand the experience of a military school-age child in a peacetime mission.



### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

When I arrived at Minot Air Force Base it became clear to me the population that would be considered for this study. My assignment at that time allowed me access to a population that has not been studied making the phenomenology method of inquiry appropriate for exploring the peacetime mission. Children can be really good informants or they can be so shy that they refuse to engage in conversation. I was impressed by the children who would engage in the pediatric clinic when I asked them questions and I became more and more curious if they would answer questions related to a parent's military duties since some of their complaints were similar to those of children with a deployed member to the combat zone. For this reason I chose the qualitative method to learn the experience of children who have a parent gone from home every week up to five consecutive days.

The phenomenology method at the University of Tennessee follows the Thomas and Pollio (2002) procedure. This method is inspired by the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The procedures of conducting the phenomenological study such as selection of the sample, data collection, protection of human rights subjects, data analysis, and validating the accuracy of the findings will also be reviewed in this chapter.

#### **Research Design**

Qualitative research is an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. Researchers conduct their research in a natural setting or a comfortable setting for the participants. The goal is to make sense of phenomena and extract meanings that people ascribe to their experiences (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research is conducted when a problem needs to be explored. Little is known about military children's experience of being separated from a parent during peacetime missions.

Phenomenology seeks to understand meaning of the person's experience of the phenomenon (Cresswell, 2014). This methodological approach is well suited for studying experiences of school age children separated from their parents and draws from the philosopher Merleau-Ponty who proposed that the human experience is understood as "being-in-the-world." This experience is created by perceptions and "we are in the world through our body, and in so far as we perceive the world with our body" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 239). According to Merleau-Ponty, "our basic mode of experience is perception of the actual world" (Matthews, 2006, p. 29).

This phenomenological approach does not seek theoretical explanations, instead it intends to create an intimate connection with research participants without theorizing about them before getting to know them. To understand the world of a child in the military the researcher must gain access to their experience. According to Merleau-Ponty, the empirical or objective way of science is not the most fundamental way of understanding ourselves. Instead, he indicates that we give meaning to concepts in what he calls the "absolute source" (Matthews, 2006). He recognized that his experiences were different from others and it was important to recognize that we each see the world differently. This is significant for children as they perceive their experiences differently based on their individual uniqueness, age, and developmental stage. Phenomenology for Merleau-Ponty is to describe our existence in the world and our various modes of being in the world (Matthews, 2006). According to Merleau-Ponty, perception is primary as it "affords a direct experience of the events, objects, and phenomena of the world" (Sohn, Thomas, Greenberg, & Pollio, 2017, pg. 125). The goal of phenomenology research is to see the world as the study participants perceive it.

In describing perception, Merleau-Ponty discusses the figure/ground concept from German Gestalt psychology. Things perceived are always viewed as a whole, including a contextual background (ground) and some things that stand out (figural). Analysis must always pay attention to what is perceived (figural) while discussing it in relation to the context (ground) (Sohn, Thomas, Greenberg, & Pollio, 2017). Merleau-Ponty's philosophy specifies the grounds of human experience in the lifeworld as corporeality, temporality, relationally and spatiality, or as discussed in more simple terms as Body, Time, Others, and World by Sohn and colleagues (2017). These grounds will be discussed as they pertain to children.

**Body.** According to Merleau-Ponty, the Body is the fundamental category of human existence; it exists before thought (Pollio et al., 1997). Merleau-Ponty disagreed with the separation of mind and body that prior western philosophers adhered to. Embodiment can be described as the body creates thinking when it is immersed in the world; experience in the world leads to the creation of the body's thinking. Children first experience the world through the bodily connection with their parents. Mothers are more likely than fathers to hold their babies, while fathers are more likely to give them "playful physical stimulation" (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010, p. 458). Throughout childhood, children experience the world through the people who are hugging them, hitting them, or playing physical games with them.

**Time.** According to Merleau-Ponty, Time is a subjective experience and is the widest sense. Time is a concept that is also dependent on development for children. An absence of a parent from home for five days could be perceived as a child as much longer than it actually is by the objective measurements of clocks and calendars. Sohn, et al., (2017) quote Merleau-Ponty's description of time as "a setting to which one can gain access and which one can understand only by occupying a situation in it" (p. 332).

**Others.** The existential ground of Others is highly significant to the present research and is described as the “network of relationships in which we spend our lives” (Sohn, et al., 2017, p. 127). This existential ground is fascinating because military children must not only become accustomed to deployment separations from parents but also to moving and saying good-bye to relationships and arriving at a new destination and starting new relationships. This may be particularly hard for school-age children as peers are a significant part of their life during this developmental stage. For school-aged children who talked with me about their experience of parents working in the missile field, they are very well aware of relationships with friends and parents’ relationships with friends.

**World.** According to Merleau-Ponty, “we are inseparable from the world” (as cited in Sohn, Thomas, Greenberg, & polio, 2017, pg. 127). Military children are in a different world albeit not by choice and it is their perception of their world that I asked them to explain. As the military culture has invaded these children, it is different than children who do not have a parent in the military. It is up to these children to explain their experience in this world so that we may understand. They too are inseparable from their world in the military.

### **Sampling**

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Tennessee and IRB for the Department of Defense, a purposeful sampling strategy was used to enroll school-age children for the study. Recruitment was at the pediatric clinic, youth center, the key spouses group, and word of mouth on the North Dakota military base. At the time of enrollment, all details of the research study were communicated with the children and parents. Inclusion criteria for the study sample was as follows: (a) school-age child between the ages of eight and twelve, (b) they must have at least one parent assigned to an ICBM site that requires them to be

away from home two to five days consecutive days in support of maintaining nuclear missiles, and (c) participants and a parent will be available for one interview. It was anticipated that approximately 12 school-age children would be recruited for the study.

Parents of 11 children agreed to volunteer but only eight children (3 males and 5 females) would commit to interview at the actual time of data collection. Ages of the children ranged from 8 - 12 years old. The first three children who interviewed were volunteers and then snowballing became effective as they shared the study with friends who then volunteered. At the time of interviews, one family was out of town that had two children between eight and 12 years of age. The other two families were not reachable or did not respond to phone calls or emails.

### **Data Collection**

Phenomenological interviewing differs significantly from typical interviewing or the type of interviewing I do in clinic when seeking information from a child regarding an illness. Therefore, I start first by discussing what research says about the process of interviewing children. Children as research subjects have long been controversial. It is believed that children lack “verbal skills, conceptual abilities, recall, and overall competence to convey their experiences” (Docherty & Sandelowski, 1998, p. 177). However, children as young as three years old have been found to have excellent recall and can provide detailed descriptions of their experiences (Farver & Frosch, 1996). As a PNP, I too find that children as young as three years old can answer questions in detail about themselves and recent events and many can tell elaborate stories as well. Children are the best informants of their own experiences. However, children will not freely give information to a stranger or researcher. In clinic I found that children need to feel comfortable before freely answering questions. Younger children require comfort in observing their parents interacting before they are able to feel more comfortable. School-age children and older children require getting

acquainted before they will talk freely. Even approval from their parents is not enough. In this study I started conversation with their parent first, then during the consent process then with each child asking how old, what school they attend, and something unique to the child if I had the information. This might include a question about siblings or friends, or maybe their parent's job. This usually made children more comfortable to allow questions related to the study.

Galinski (1999) asked children what they thought about their working parents and found the children's answers illuminating. At the time this book was written more women were entering the workforce, prompting an ongoing debate whether having a working mother was good or bad for children. Galinsky felt there was a gap "between how children think and what researchers have studied" (pg. xxi). Consistent with recent literature on the effects of deployment on children, Galinsky found that "the literature had not touched on some of the issues that are central to children, including whether parents are there for their children, children's guilt, and children's feelings about the busyness of their parents" (xxi-xxii). It was time to listen to the children in order to embrace a more accurate and more empowering view. Galinski discussed her findings as "messages" and they were discussed similar to themes as discussed in phenomenology. A concept that arose out of her study was in regards to the time parents spent with their children. The concept was quality time versus quantity of time. A 12- year old boy of divorced parents with both parents working full time stated, "The more time you spend with your kids, the stronger the bond between you. If you can't find time, make time." (p. 343). A 12-year-old female with married parents and both working full time stated, "Spend a lot of time with your children, because when you're gone, there is a big hole in our hearts that makes some or most of us want to cry" (p. 344). Another message in Galinski's research was Put Your Family First. An 11-year-old boy with married parents stated "Unless you

are dying of starvation or are strongly in need of money, PUT YOUR FAMILY BEFORE THE WORK” (p. 345). Children in this study did not think their parents were aware of how they felt.

Interviews can be anxiety producing for children (Faux, Walsh, & Deatrick, 1988). These authors suggest that researchers clarify the purpose of the interview, expectations of the child, and the role of the interviewer. Also, phases of development pose challenges to motivational factors that effect a child’s participation in research. School-age children may participate in research to enhance their status with peers. Faux, Walsh, and Deatrick. (1988) indicate cooperation is an imperative component of qualitative research with children. Interviewing is unfamiliar to children and can present motivational issues. Using reasons such as increased scientific knowledge or improved health care for children are not terms that children understand and do not gain a child’s cooperation.

According to Piaget’s concrete operational level of cognitive development, school-age children do not understand, formulate, or communicate abstract concepts. Faux, Walsh, and Deatrick (1988) recommend starting with questions that require concrete responses and then move to more abstract questions depending on their cognitive abilities. Faux, Walsh & Deatrick (1988) also suggest that “allowing children some degree of control over the specific location of the interview also can enhance data collection” (p. 185). Settings like the child’s home may allow the child to see the researcher less of an authority figure, instead more as an interested adult. Despite many researcher’s efforts to conduct interviews with children, there is still “little concrete guidance available for interviewing children” (Docherty & Sandelowski, 1999, p. 177). In their review of literature on interviewing children they found that children best respond to “what-happens-when” types of questions (p.179). They also found that an unstructured interview is best to capture a detailed perspective of the child. In relation to the content of the interview, it should be clarified

for the child the purpose of the interview. Docherty and Sandelowski (1999) also found that multiple interviews may be less informative so only one interview should be accomplished. Children tend to incorporate information from previous interviews into subsequent interviews. Also, lengthy interviews are discouraged as children become fatigued and can contribute to decreased data credibility (Faux, Walsh & Deatrck, 1988). They suggest that school-aged children be interviewed for 30 to 45 minutes for best results and older children greater than 10 years for an hour or more if needed. Flexibility and adapting interview techniques and questions to a child's cognitive level is important for an interviewer. The adult-child relationship, unfamiliarity with interviews, and limited attention span should all be considered. Faux, Walsh, and Deatrck (1988) also suggest allowing children to draw at the beginning because it is a familiar task and can decrease anxiety. Talking about the drawing promotes rapport and builds the relationship between the child and interviewer. In the past, recorders were considered reactive devices, but is rarely a problem today with children's exposure to sophisticated electronic equipment.

Individual interviews allow the researcher to give the participant their full attention. Research indicates that interviews are well suited for going into depth about an experience or a topic the child understands. Studies across many disciplines have used interviews to explore the lives of children 5 to 14 years old (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). These studies indicated that children even at a very young age have the capacity to participate in research to share their experiences (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). However, they found that not all children responded the same way. Researchers faced challenges to include shyness and reluctance to speak. Based on their experience researchers suggest that interviewers develop a relationship with each participant and customize each setting to allow the children to develop a comfort level. For example, some children love to draw



so an interviewer might give them a pen and paper to doodle in an effort to make them feel comfortable enough to answer questions and stay engaged (Clark, 2011). Freeman and Mathison (2009) found that the younger the child the more challenging it is to keep them engaged. This is another reason why I selected children 8 to 12 years of age. I had colored markers and paper, music, some Legos, and stickers available to help the children feel more comfortable and aid in continuous engagement during the interview if needed. All but two of the children I interviewed either drew pictures or colored in books. The two that chose not to do so felt they were mature enough to just answer questions. Any drawings or art created by the child were not used as a source of data for analysis at this time.

The interview required one meeting with the child. On the same day just prior to the interview I explained to the participant and parent the purpose of their interview and details of the study and answered any questions they had. The parents all signed a consent form allowing their child to participate in the study. I read the study details to all but two children who stated they could read it. Parents were present and each child provided verbal assent that their voice would be recorded along with the interview. Both the parent and child signed the permission form. Once permission was received from both the parent and child, the parent left the room and the child continued for the interview. I scheduled interviews for 20 minutes with the option for more or less time as required for each individual child.

Once consent and assent were obtained, the interview began with an open-ended question. Additional questions were asked to clarify, refocus on unfolding themes, add details, and provide examples. The additional questions were not determined in advance. The number of children interviewed stopped when I heard no new information or until a repetition of themes began to stand out with no new themes detected (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). If the child was to become sad, angered,

or experience other emotional dilemmas, they had access to a psychologist who is the behavioral specialist in the Family Health Clinic and currently sees patient's ages five and up. Referral did not become necessary. The child was informed he/she could stop participating at any time during the interview.

All interviews were audiotaped with a digital recorder and transcribed verbatim. A transcriptionist transcribed the taped interviews; therefore, a confidentiality statement was obtained from the transcriptionist to ensure the research interviews were kept confidential and private. Transcripts, audiotapes, informed consents, and confidentiality statements will be kept in the office of the principal investigator for three years at which time they will be destroyed. Electronic computer files with research study information will be kept on a password-protected computer belonging to the principal investigator until the study is completed and then deleted.

### **Setting**

ICBMs are weapons that are essential to the strength of our nation and support the homeland defense mission. The Air Force (AF) is historically known as the experts for putting airplanes in the air. Only few really know the details of the ICBM mission. I say this because I am a 24-year veteran and I did not know much about this mission until I moved to Minot for duty and visited a Military Alert Facility (MAF) where operations have been going on daily for over 60 continuous years.

This mission requires specially trained military personnel to be at the ICBM site miles away from the military base 24 hours a day. There are several duty specialties required to maintain the ICBMs. Both officers and enlisted are transported out to the sites on over 10 thousand acres around the base located 60 miles from the Canadian border in North Dakota. When children in this study discuss dad being on alert, they are referring to their parent on duty at the missile sites. Some

members go underground where their duties are to maintain the ICBM equipment used to launch the ICBM located at an undisclosed location away from this same site. The facilities underground provide space for members to sleep and they have bathrooms. Some members maintain the facility above ground where those working underground eat, workout, have a TV and reading room, and have shower facilities. Many other members are security forces that are required to keep the MAF and ICBM sites secure where duty outside is required. The missile silos are several miles away from each MAF. This can present great challenges to members who are required to brave the elements of North Dakota winters to travel back and forth between the MAF and the missile. The number of days a parent is away to maintain ICBMs can be cumulatively much greater than the time one spends away from home for deployment to a war zone. Stressors at this nuclear base are different due to the peacetime mission requirements and while the risks are not as great, there are situations that present great challenges. In addition to a challenging mission, I also found living in North Dakota challenging so I imagine other military families do as well. Winters are long, really long and in fact last for most of nine months. Any precipitation falling in September through May is snow and wind is the only thing that is constant causing frequent blizzards and extreme decreased visibility hazardous conditions. The temperatures for much of winter drops to 30 to 60 below zero. Despite the austere conditions military families carry on this mission and it is not known if these combined challenges are affecting military children and families.

### **Participants**

Research participants were purposefully selected individuals who have experienced a parent being away from home each week and who ascertained their willingness to talk about their experience in an audio-recorded interview. Interviews were conducted in a natural setting of the child's preference without a parent present. Access to many locations on base were available to

include an office in the library, youth center, room in the pediatric clinic, and chapel. The child chose the site they were most comfortable with where there is privacy and a quiet space. I visited each of the locations listed above to ensure there was a room sufficient to ensure privacy. Each space allowed sufficient privacy without interruptions and was also comfortable for an interview. I was required to give 24-hour notice to any of the facility managers to allow me access to any of the venues. Each child in this study selected their home to interview as they were most comfortable in that setting. Each home space provided a quiet area with semi-privacy. The parents could continue with their daily activities at home. Interviews were scheduled around federal holidays as everything on base is closed during those times and are revered as quality family time. Few barriers were anticipated; however, if the child and parent could not make the desired interview times, days were built into the time frame to allow rescheduling.

The first family that volunteered had three children between 8 and 12 years of age, Cinderella (12-year-old female), Dori (10-year-old female) and Ninja (8 year old male). The second family had two children volunteer, J.T. (12-year-old male) and T-Rex (11-year-old female). Dakota (8-year-old male) was the next volunteer and he is an only child. Elsa (9-year-old female) was interviewed next and she has two smaller siblings. Elsa was the most difficult to interview because she did not want to talk about mom or dad. She was disappointed that when dad was home he would be involved in his own activities and not with the children. She did not see a difference between the time when dad was at work or when he was home. Belle (8-year-old female) was the last one to interview and she has a 30 month old sister. All the children were from a family with mother and father. However, Belle was the only child in a blended family and her biological mother was deployed to a combat zone at the time of the interview.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Privacy and confidentiality were maintained at all times through the entire study. Personal identifying information was removed from all documents, presentations, and publications related to the research study. Children chose their own pseudonym to protect their identity and for use in all correspondence related to the study. All recordings, transcripts, and all documents related to the research study including consent forms were kept in a locked file in the PI's office. Electronic files were maintained on a password-protected computer belonging to the principal investigator. This means only myself, the PI, can access anything stored on my assigned computer. The data were backed up with an external hard drive that was removed daily prior to departure and placed in a locked drawer only accessible by the PI who has the key.

The transcriptionist signed a confidentiality statement before access to transcripts was granted. The recorded interviews were sent to the transcriptionist via secure email and the transcribed documents were sent back to the PI via the same email return when completed by the transcriptionist. Members of the research team, transcriptionist, and phenomenology interpretive group are the only other persons who viewed research information, as specified in the IRB application. Children were given a small gift valued at five dollars to show appreciation for their participation in the study once they completed the interview.

### **Procedure of this Research Method**

In this section I describe specific procedures used in this research study. Procedures followed the method developed at University of Tennessee (UTK) with the added assistance of the interdisciplinary Phenomenology Research Group (PRG) (Sohn, et al., 2017, p. 128). The group has been meeting since 1994 and has mentored dozens of PhD students during their dissertation

research. The interpretive group consists of faculty and graduate students from a variety of disciplines, including nursing, psychology, education, and child and family studies with some members having years of experience with the method and others joining for help with their research study or to refine their skills. I joined to seek assistance with analyzing transcripts as well as learn more about the phenomenology method used in this study. I attended the phenomenology interpretive group, either in person or via distance technology. Benefits of this group also include maintaining rigor of the study (Sohn, et al., 2017). I completed a bracketing interview to help me develop “a keen awareness of assumptions and expectations” (Sohn, et al., 2017). My experience as a PNP and my own experience could instill bias and cause me to ask questions that lead children to focus on aspects of the phenomenon that I think are important rather than what stands out to the children. Members of the group analyzed my bracketing interview so that they could intervene and identify where my biases interfered. Members are respectful but critical in providing assistance, which was critical for me to gain knowledge for the interpretation process. It was helpful and not intimidating to receive assistance from interpretive group members.

Transcribed interview data was the source of evidence that was analyzed. Analysis of the data is a continuous process and a tedious process of relating a part of some text in the transcript to the whole of the text. Analysis involves the researcher working independently with the transcript as well as presenting some transcripts to the interdisciplinary research group for their assistance with thematization. The first step of interpretation is when the transcript is read aloud by two members of the interpretive group. One reader takes the part of the participant and one takes the part of the interviewer. To bring the text to life, “reading aloud allows the researcher to not only see but to also hear the text, making it a more experimental process” (Sohn, et al., 2017, p. 137).

The text is read until a member asks to stop because something “stands out” regarding the phenomenon. The principal investigator listens and takes notes as the group discussion proceeds. All members identify meaningful coding statements, while continuously working toward a thematic description, analyzing each line of the transcript. During this process the members identified major grounds as well as figural aspects of the phenomenon. The group also assisted with looking within and across interviews for similarities. Global themes were identified across interview transcripts. I presented a list of proposed themes to the group with specific textural support. The group examined the themes and assisted me with choosing the most descriptive terms to describe the perception of school-age military children regarding parental absence for missile site duty.

### **Rigor of the Study**

Much debate exists regarding the validity of phenomenological research and how it can be generalizable to other populations or add to evidence-based knowledge. Although “Cochrane criteria qualified qualitative research as the lowest level of evidence” (Wijngaarden, van der Meide & Dahlberg, 2017, p. 1738), the goal of qualitative research is not generalize to a population but to “embrace complexities, existential matters, and lived experience” (Wijngaarden, van der Meide & Dahlberg, 2017, p. 1739). Qualitative research should focus on addressing those issues and problems that are deemed non-researchable by quantitative researchers. The purpose of qualitative research is to “contribute to a deeper understanding of human experiences, advances in concept and theory development, and development of pedagogical and counseling interventions” (as stated in Sohn, Thomas, Greenberg, & Pollio, 2017, p. 142). Research has to be valid to be useful to patients, clients, health professionals and other researchers.

Validity in qualitative research is based on whether the study measures what is intended to measure (Wijngaarden, van der Meide & Dahlberg, 2017). These authors also state that validity is

associated with meaning and meaning according to Merleau-Ponty is always contextual and should be meaningful to more people than those involved in the present study. Wijngaarden, van der Meade and Dahlberg (2017) indicate that “researchers should address contextuality when presenting their conclusions” (p. 1742). Assistance from the PRG proved valuable in relation to contextuality. A full description of the phenomenon contains both essential, general meanings as well as meaning nuances and quotes from the interviews to reveal the variations.

To determine if findings are accurate particularity and generality, uniqueness and sameness, are examined. According to Merleau-Ponty, “particularity and generality is a natural paradox within being and of the lifeworld” (Wijngaarden, van der Meade & Dahlberg, 2017, p. 1743). It is up to the researcher to discuss the uniqueness and sameness in their findings that does not deduce conclusions but instead provide plausible and inceptive insights into the meaning of a lived experience. It is reasonable that the themes of a new study would be similar or perhaps extend the present study findings, if the essence of the phenomenon has been captured.

Rigor in this study was maintained through careful transcription of the audiotaped interviews and strict adherence to the specified analytic procedures. I sought help from the PRG to keep the findings authentic when describing experiences, focusing on the sensitivity of the context in which the children live. The interpretive group also served as an external auditor. The members were not familiar with the topic of the study or myself and provided an objective assessment of the study. My bracketing interview and self-reflection throughout the study, through keeping a journal of my thoughts and feelings, decreased any bias that could shape my interpretations of the interviews. Reflexivity is an important characteristic of qualitative research.



## **Chapter Summary**

There is enormous lack of knowledge regarding the impact of deployment on children in peacetime missions. The impact is far reaching as military children are growing up in a culture where the impact is unknown and are attending civilian schools, being treated by civilian medical professionals, attending childcare, and transitioning to civilian life. To promote healthy lifestyles of these children, and intervene if they are distressed, it is imperative that we have a greater understanding of their experience. A qualitative phenomenology method of inquiry was chosen for this study and described in this chapter. Findings of this study will be useful to healthcare professionals, teachers, and all persons interacting with military school-age children. The findings appear in the following chapter.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

In this chapter, I introduce the thematic structure to provide the big picture. I then break down each theme into units to examine its constituent parts for a greater understanding of the pieces that make up each theme. Children's own words are used as much as possible to depict their perceptions and feelings.

### **Thematic Structure**

This study examined the experience of military school-aged children who have a parent who works away from home maintaining ICBMs for three to five consecutive days a week. The contextual ground is the canvas where all figures can be seen or found. However, figure and ground “co-create each other in human experience” in a reversible pattern (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The ground seen here is the chiasm between dad and child and the special relationship between them. Children in this study poignantly described interactions with their fathers and descriptions of their relationship included both an active and passive state. There are five figural (predominant) themes in this study: (1) Missing Dad, (2) Coping with Absence, (3) He's Really Fun, (4) Anxiety: “I'm scared when he goes on alert”, and (5) Dad's Really Important to the Family. Each theme is illustrated with quotes from the transcripts.

### **Theme One: Missing Dad.**

Missing Dad was shared in all the children's interviews. This was the most prevalent theme and seemed to be a topic that was keenly shared and crossed all father-child relationships. Cinderella simply stated “I miss him” and went on to describe events that were important to her involving her dad. She stated that when he is deployed she is “not able to have dad's famous grilled cheese” and “mom doesn't know how to make it like dad.” She also stated, “we like to do things with dad...go to the zoo and playground, go on walks and to the mall”, and “he helps us make snow

forts.” Cinderella’s perception is that things are more enjoyable and memorable when dad is involved. During the interview, Cinderella sometimes spoke in third person. She stated, “our dog really misses him...dad is his favorite.” She relayed her emotions onto the dog as if the dog experienced the same thing. Stating that dad is the dog’s favorite could represent dad is also her favorite but she doesn’t want mom to know, so she places that sentiment on the dog who can’t clarify the statement. Dad is involved and reciprocates by making the child’s favorite food and going on outings with his children. His presence is exemplified through Cinderella’s vivid description of how she perceives the events with dad.

Dorie stated she has trouble sleeping because “I missed daddy” but was reluctant to say this. She had talked about a doll she used to have where she could replace the face of it with a photo of dad and she would “snuggle with it whenever daddy was gone” and it “helped her sleep.” When she stated she missed daddy, it was at this point she disengaged from the interview, apparently uncomfortable talking about missing him.

Ninja stated more than once, “I really miss dad” and “I don’t like to play outside when dad’s not home.” He also stated “when dad’s home we do some really fun stuff, go on walks.” Ninja also spoke of food and the role dad has in providing him some yummy food. He stated “daddy makes the best mac-n-cheese, grilled cheese, and peanut butter and jelly sandwich.” He spoke of these as if these foods comforted him. It could also be that his relationship with dad is most memorable when dad is making the food he likes because it pleases Ninja. This relationship is also reciprocal and both dad and child have appreciation for the food interaction. Ninja appreciates dad’s food and dad makes it because he could be receiving similar appreciation from his children.

J.T. also spoke of missing dad. J.T. stated “I just really want to have time with him” and “I just like being able to play with my dad.” J.T. discussed the interactive relationship he has with his dad in that “it’s nice being able to go outside and play some baseball...dad plays baseball with me...and dad lets me throw the ball hard.” In this conversation, J.T. described how he enjoyed the one-on-one interaction with his father that excluded his sisters; “my sisters do not” [play ball with dad]. J.T.’s relationship with dad is really important as J.T. is the only male when dad is not at home. He enjoys his dad’s presence as if he relates more to his dad than his sisters.

T-Rex also spoke of missing her dad, stating that her dad going to the missile field can be “bad” because “I feel like crying...I missed him.” It gets better when “he comes home.” When asked about crying she didn’t want to discuss it “cause I’m scared.” She stated that when dad’s gone it’s “boring,” a different term used than J.T. who indicated when dad is gone he is lonely. T-Rex indicated things are not the same when dad is home, “mom takes us out to eat...no leftovers” and when dad is home “he cooks with mommy” as if T-Rex prefers eating at home. T-Rex also prefers playing with dad over siblings and also reports wanting more time with dad when he is home.

Dakota, whose words appeared in the introductory chapter of the dissertation, stated, “I miss him so bad...he’s gone a long time” and voiced his sadness that dad “misses special occasions” such as “like your birthday.” Dakota made a frown when saying dad missed these special occasions. Dakota also spoke in second or third person at times during the interview. He stated “they can go out and then you can have and you can keep those moments and you can um, still see them and when they come home, you can have more time with them and then when they’re gone, you could pretend that he’s here with you...because you might miss him so bad that you want to, you want to see them very bad and you can’t until they come home so you pretend that they’re

home.” He shrugged his shoulders and said that [Missing Dad] “could hurt you...could make you cry bad, make you sad or me sad.” His words describe clearly how difficult it is for Dakota for dad to be away from home. Dakota was also the youngest child to be interviewed so it is possible that he is not able to process dad being gone as well as the children 2-4 years older than he is.

Belle was very articulate but avoided discussing her missing dad. Instead, she stated that her 2 year old sister “misses him a lot.” Belle stated that she thought this because her sister is constantly asking “Where’s daddy?” and if she is sad Belle plays games with her. Belle never overtly discussed herself missing dad.

### **Theme Two: Coping with Absence.**

The theme Coping with Absence related to what children did to cope when they were missing dad when he was away at the missile site for his military service. Cinderella shared that she “draws a lot...people’s faces” and “I try drawing a picture of dad to look at it.” She also added “we like drawing him [pictures of] lots of presents and stuff,” with a smile on her face. Belle drew pictures, sometimes “puppies” because she wants a puppy and then most of the time she drew “abstract art.” Doing things to please dad was also common throughout the transcripts. All children felt the need to do things that pleased dad as well as not so pleasing things that would still get dad’s attention when he returned home from work. Example of things that pleased dad were pictures that Cinderella and Belle discussed drawing for dad. There were also things not so pleasing for dad when he returned home like the fights among siblings that Dorie spoke of when dad is away and when J.T. admitted that he is “just rude to my mom...and talk back.”

As discussed earlier, Dorie stated that she “used to have dolls with dad’s face, it helped me sleep.” She described the dolls as having interchangeable faces where you could place a photo of a face; her mom would place a photo of dad there and this would help Dorie sleep. She was able

to feel as if dad was with her. She also stated “We Skype with dad on the iPad and it calms us down.” Ninja described coping with dad’s absence by “playing lots of video games...I read, I study, I spend more time eating.” He repeated again “I play new games, sometimes watch movies.” He indicated “I don’t like to play outside when dad’s not home.” This seemed like an activity that was reserved for interacting with dad because of their mutual love for the outdoors and guy things.

T-Rex indicated she too watched her iPad more when dad was away from home because “it gets kind of boring.” She did not indicate mom is involved except that mom works. It should be noted that no specific questions in interviews were asked about mom due to the nature of phenomenological interview procedure.

Technology provided another way for the children to cope with their fathers’ absence. For example, Dakota stated “we sometimes call him...if they don’t answer, then you can text him and make sure they’re doing fine and nothing happened.” He also stated that he liked to FaceTime with dad but “Wi-Fi is not good, difficult to talk and FaceTime with dad.” Dakota also indicated that he cannot always cope well, admitting that “it’s not good cause you can cry or you can do bad stuff and it cannot be good for you and then you might want him to stay out there and not see him again maybe.” He is referring to being in trouble, which dad will address when he returns home. Dakota has three sisters and seems to get in trouble a lot when dad is gone. Dakota makes a facial expression like he is mad scrunching his mouth, eyebrows and forehead like he was getting mad. Dakota said that “one time when he was gone, I wanted to see him again, but I couldn’t cause he was out in the field and that made me mad.” When asked what makes it better he stated, “when he came home from the field, it made me feel better.” Dakota also stated that he sometimes, “you could pretend he’s here with you...because, you might miss him so bad that you want to, you want to see them very bad and you can’t until they come home so you pretend that they’re home.” Dad

seems to make things all better with Dakota when he returns, providing a sense that he and dad have a close relationship.

The majority of coping children discussed was in relation to technology. Coping seemed to only take place inside the home with no activity outside. This may be partly due to long winters however, the children did not mention going outside except when dad was home.

Belle spoke of helping her 30-month-old sister cope with dad's absence by playing games; she stated that "I know my sister misses him a lot...she's like "Where's daddy?" and she'll knock on my door and I'll open and she'll say 'when daddy come, play pie face'. Belle received Pie Face when visiting with her biological mother. Belle also stated she plays "Banana where we just chase each other, it's funny" when her little sister is upset. J.T. did not directly talk about what he did to cope with dad being gone but he admitted he was rude to his mother and would get in trouble for this type of behavior when his father returned from deployment.

### **Theme Three: He's Really Fun.**

This theme depicted the obvious joy that the children experienced in their relationship with their father. Cinderella states "he's really fun" and "we like to do things with dad like going to the zoo, playground, on walks, to the mall and stores." She smiled and her eyes lit up when she stated, "he helps up make snow forts." She had the same joyful expressions when talking about going to see dad at work. She stated about dad's work, "there's these cool cars and there's these cool vehicles there that they showed us and there's this big building, like where they sleep and where they eat at." She seemed proud to talk about dad's work and what he did.

Dorie also displayed a happy expression when talking about dad's work. She stated "it was fun and loud...the kids were a little crazy...they were super loud." She further describes dad's workplace as "it was nice" because we got to see dad and "He tells everybody what to do and what

not to do.” Ninja described “dad’s work is cool” and “lunch was the best.” This young man loves to eat. He references food several times when talking about the good food dad makes. “When he’s home we make the best food.” He states dad “makes the best mac-n-cheese, grilled cheese, and peanut butter and jelly.” He also states dad is fun “When dad’s home we do some really fun stuff...go on walks.” All things that Ninja described that were fun required dad’s participation and reciprocal interaction.

JT indicated that it was “fun when he’s home from work, he sits down with us and watches TV.” JT also discussed numerous activities he enjoyed with dad. He stated “I just like being able to play with my dad just really nice being able to go outside and play some baseball with him. JT got really excited when he stated “we take the 4-wheelers out and get loose.” JT also showed excitement when talking about baseball. “Dad plays baseball with me, my sisters do not...dad lets me throw the ball hard” This was real father and son time as he beamed of his time alone with dad; later in the interview, he seemed to long for more of this special 1:1 time.

T-Rex indicated “he plays with us, that’s fun.” She mentioned this more than once and stated “he plays with us and is really fun.” She indicated her siblings “they usually like playing with daddy” and she prefers playing with dad over her siblings. This indicates a secure relationship with dad and she desires that reversibility with dad.

Dakota discussed his relationship with dad “when they come home, then they can, then you can spend as much at time as you can with him.” This put a smile on his face. Belle showed little emotion and carefully thought about her answers; even when talking about playing a board game with dad she was reserved and matter of fact. When discussing time with dad Belle states “we’ll play this, sometimes, we’ll play this game. Its call Hogwarts Battle and it’s where we have to try and save some villains. It’s like a cooperative game.” Then “I’ll show him if I make any drawings



all over when he's gone um, I'll show him and then, um, then, we don't, do, really do anything then and then I like go upstairs to do homework or something and he'll help me with my homework if I need it cause usually um, my sister's napping whenever I come home, so if I need help in my homework, he'll help me." As Belle spoke, she showed no emotion as if this was a task and she wanted to complete it and be done.

#### **Theme Four: Anxiety.**

"I'm scared when he goes on alert." Anxiety and insecurity were evident whenever the children described their fathers' absence from home. Dakota spoke of worrying about dad on the job. It can be dangerous in the winter with the cold, wind and snow. Dad being away from home was obviously stressful for Dorie. She stated, "I don't like it when he goes to the field" and "I get nervous about him when I have, when there's bad storms" She went on to say "because sometimes when he's gone, there's really, really bad storms when he's out in the field so I get worried about it really bad." When asked to clarify what else makes you nervous Dorie stated "I don't really talk about why I'm nervous" and disengaged from the conversation. She showed frustration with body language raising her hands in the air and placing her chin in her hands when speaking of dolls and stated "we used to have these dolls with daddy's face on it but they all broke." She described the doll as "it was this blue doll and it would have little slot and hair and then mommy would find a photo of daddy and she would stick in the slot for a face. I use to snuggle with it... whenever daddy was gone... it helped me sleep." Dad's absences were times of fear and anxiety for Dorie. The doll that once calmed her is broken and she did not speak of a replacement that could help allay her fears. Dorie was the oldest of the children who interviewed. Her anxiety and fear could be greater because of her developmental ability to understand the dangers of winter weather and hazards of the missile sites. J.T. displayed frowning and other facial changes and body language as he spoke

of dad being away. He frowned and talked about being lonely more than once, “It gets lonely sometimes because he’s gone all the time” and “It’s just a little bit lonely without my dad understanding with three girls in the house.” Even when dad is home J.T. says that “I just really want to have time with him, cause he’s either at work or after work at the, at the jobs he has to do ...he has to help, he helps out with or like he goes and works somewhere that needs fixing just for his friends.” This lack of one-to-one time with dad seemed to cause insecurity or anxiety for J.T. as this was important enough for him to talk about it.

Dakota indicated days could be good or bad when dad’s away. In addition to stating it was bad when dad missed special occasions he also stated that it’s also bad when “you don’t get to see him for two weeks and then they might be home for two days and then they have to go back out to the field...It’s not very good.” It also bothered Dakota “that’s much harder for mom to handle us but when dad’s home, it’s very hard for mom...much harder for mom to handle us” When he’s gone, “sometimes it can make me sad.” He also indicated that it’s “kind of hard on me” and it “stresses mom out...mom is stressed out while he’s gone.” He was one of two children who specifically discussed adverse effects of dad being away from home on mom. Dakota states “mom has to do everything herself.” Dakota admitted throwing stuff or breaking something and doing bad stuff. His emotions were manifested in aggressive behavior and would get him in trouble. However, this would also get him attention from dad, albeit for a negative reason, but any time with dad appeared to be a good time.

Elsa described a different frustration because when dad is home he is not at home “like most of the time he’s out of the house because that’s his way of relaxing...like he’s on vacation, he would just go out the house or go to that gas station or do work and not like relax because that’s his relaxing.” When dad was home but not really there, he was disengaged from family activities.

This caused Elsa anxiety as seen in her body language and facial expressions. She changed eye direction, no longer making eye contact. It appeared to be sad for her because she really wanted to spend time with dad. She had a smile on her face, however, when she discussed “he always gives us a good-bye kiss when he goes, before he goes, because he has to leave at 5 and we never wake up at 5, never 5 o’clock in the morning...he never forgets and plus I remind him every day” and laughed. Elsa also mentioned twice that “he’s very difficult. I’m still trying to figure him out.” This caused her to shrug her shoulders and frown.

Belle showed no emotion when answering questions. She was matter of fact and seemed to keep looking around for her stepmom before she answered a question. She appeared to be focused on the task at hand.

#### **Theme Five: Dad’s Really Important to the Family.**

The theme of “Dad’s really important to the family” represents, in part, the hierarchal structure of the military that apparently crosses over to the family. Dad is seen as the leader of the family, like “the principal.” (J.T.) Dorie had observed that when she visited dad at the missile site, “he tells everybody what to do and what not to do.” This was also the case at home; she reported that “everybody fights when he’s gone” and “Stacy and Katie fight a lot” when dad is gone. It was as if dad is the only one who can control the chaos; she did not discuss mom or if mom attempted to control the chaos. Dakota echoed Dorie’s description of family chaos during his father’s absence, stating its “hard for mom to handle us” and “mom has to do everything.” He also stated “you might be so mad” and “throw stuff and break something, you get in trouble” Dorie also indicated when dad was away that “we watch a lot of movies, get to stay up late and we have sleepovers.” Her facial expression was obvious she thought that breaking dad’s rules could also be fun.

J.T. seemed proud to share that his dad is “more like the principal, when he comes home, he intervenes.” J.T. indicated he tries to stay out of trouble when dad is not home but that is sometimes difficult with his sisters. His sisters do not like to play baseball with J.T. and he is the only boy with dad at work. “Dad lets me throw the ball hard” and his sisters don’t like this. J.T. also stated “I’m just rude to my mom” and “like if I talk back.” He stated dad would intervene when he arrived home, so he makes the effort to stay out of trouble. It did not appear that J.T. created trouble as a way for him to spend time with dad as other children sometimes did. He understood that his behavior caused his mom frustration and he would be in big trouble when dad arrived home. It may be that dad expected J.T. to be the “man of the house” when he is at work so this would be a negative thing for J.T. if he was in trouble and not being responsible.

Ninja’s statement that “daddy is really important to the family” perfectly summed up what other children were describing regarding dad’s role at home. He also said “when dad’s home, it’s better.” He too spoke of conflict that occurs among his siblings, “guys get meaner” and my “sister starts yelling,” conflict that always begins when dad leaves. His statements reinforced other children’s descriptions of dad as the authority figure in the home.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

The existential grounds of body, time, others and world serve as context in military school-aged children's descriptions of their experience of their father working away from home at the missile site at Minot AFB every week. There were five figural themes that emerged from interviewing the children. These themes are woven into the fabric of existential grounds as the children discussed their experience. Themes are 1) Missing Dad, 2) Coping with Absence, 3) He's Really Fun, 4) Anxiety: "I'm scared when he goes on alert" and 5) Dad's Really Important to the Family.

The existential ground of body can be appreciated when the children discuss dad's physical presence and physical activities with him, from cuddling to throwing a ball. His vital presence is evident when the children discuss having fun with dad or emphasize he's really important to the family. Dad's presence brings the children joy, as shown in emotions they displayed by facial expressions and body language during the interviews. This is seen in the figural theme of "He's Really Fun" when J.T. discussed it's "Nice being able to go outside and play some baseball" and "dad lets me throw the ball hard." The other figural theme that related to the existential ground of body was "Dad's Really Important to the Family" in which children described the importance of dad's presence to establish good order and discipline. Dad was viewed as the leader of the family, as shown when Dorie discussed the chaos "everybody fights when he's gone." In four of the interviews the child fought with other siblings. Dad seemed to be required to establish discipline. Dad being home brought peace and the fighting among siblings ceased. Although, something negative is taking place, the outcome is more time with dad or when dad intervenes, it is perceived as good. In these situations dad is the family leader and no resolution occurred until dad came home. This resonates with military culture with having one leader at the top who controls all activities down to the lowest level. It is unfortunate that moms or the caregiver at home can't control the chaos

during dad's absence; however, it was not indicated in this study that mom lacked skills to control chaos when dad was absent. The children simply did not discuss what their mothers did. None of the children spoke freely about their mother and except in relation to chaos. Phenomenological interviewing does not allow the researcher to ask pointed questions therefore, questions about mom or the caregiver were not asked. As discussed in current literature, caregivers at home have not been given adequate consideration in military research and their mental health may contribute to this type of situation by lack of ability to resolve conflict.

The figural theme of "Missing Dad" is understood within the existential ground of time. Children were very knowledgeable about time as it related to days and weeks as well as months and time of the year, but it is also evident that time is subjective and "clocks and calendars cannot define it" (Sohn, et. al., 2017, p. 127). Dad's absences are perceived as blocks of time that are long and boring, without the family outings and activities that occur when he is at home cooking their special foods or playing games with them. Military children also define time in the family events that dad misses because of his deployment, like holidays. The situation of greatest impact seemed to be when dad missed special occasions. This was spoken by nearly all the children because it was important for dad to be at their birthday celebrations, recitals, and school events to support the children. Other eventful times were when dad is needed to control chaos. Children described over and over types of situations that were important to them and emotional at the same time. A continuing common trend through all transcripts is that all children missed dad and wanted more time with dad. This was similar to other research on military children wherein researchers reported that the children missed their parent and where it was important for children if dad was present at momentous occasions (Chandra, et al., 2010; Flake, et al, 2010). Dad's presence was important to

all children and his presence was desired at all activities within the family. Time was critical for children as they linked each interaction with dad by blocks of time.

Some children admitted wanting more time with dad. J.T. stated that when dad is home is he sometimes goes to other jobs he had to do, doing things for his friends; he described a situation that dad is home but absent from home even when not working at the missile site. J.T. avoided discussing this any further.

The figural theme of “Coping with Absence” is another area related to time, because it refers to the things children did to fill the time while dad was away. Children made things for dad or things that would remind them of dad. Three children described drawing their dad random pictures because he indicated he liked their artwork. All but one child indicated that dad would take these pictures to display at work and this pleased the children. It was important for the children to let dad know he was thought of while away at work, and for them to know that he was thinking of them too. Children also did various things to get dad’s attention and to achieve more time with dad, and these behaviors ranged from good to bad (fighting, being rude, and causing trouble).

Within the existential ground of Others, beyond the figural theme of “Dad’s Really Important to the Family,” children mainly talked about their mother in reference to conflictual relationships with siblings. The mother is described a stressed and over-worked. For example, Dakota stated dad’s absence was “hard for mom to handle us” and “mom has to do everything...moms so stressed out.” T-Rex also discussed that “mom doesn’t like doing all of the work.” Children did not voluntarily talk about mom in other situations related to home.

Two children discussed others in third person. Cinderella stated that “our dog really misses him” projecting her emotions on something other than a human being. Belle stated that “my sister

[who is 30 months old] misses him a lot.” This was also another situation of emotion projected on someone else. These were similarities across transcripts that stood out.

The final existential ground of World is the most significant, with the figural theme being “Anxiety: “I’m scared when he goes on alert.” Children seemed to be well immersed into their unique world in the harsh climate of North Dakota with a parent in the missile field and the military life they lived. J.T. stated that “gets lonely sometime”...”you’re lonely.” Dorie stated “I get nervous, there’s bad storms”...”I get worried really bad”...”I don’t like to talk about why I’m nervous.” Other similar thoughts were from T-Rex who stated “I’m scared when he goes on alert”... “I get a headache when he’s away” as she spoke of the time dad is away at the missile site. Dakota spoke of being “hurt”...”could make you cry bad”...”make you sad, me sad.” He also stated that it’s “kind of hard on me” and “I like to pretend he is with you”...”keep these moments.” Elsa showed emotion through her body language stating “it’s kind of difficult.” These emotions were common across transcripts as children described situations that were difficult for them. According to Merleau-Ponty, “we are inseparable from the world, and the world invades us” (as stated in Sohn, et al., 2017, p. 127). As children reflected on situations that entered their mind they described their experience using differing terms; however, the meaning and description of anxiety was perceived to be the same for these children as I watched their body language and effort to describe the situations in their terms. For these children, they are in a world common to them but yet unknown to civilians as they stand on the outside looking in.

The world as it relates to North Dakota and long winters seemed to play a part in the children not going outside much as if the harsh climate created isolation and limited their recreation opportunities outside. Few of the children spoke of time with their dad as good times because he



would play outside when he was home. However, none of the children spoke of their mothers playing outside in winter or summer.

### **Comparisons to Previous Research**

The world of children in this study was similar to that of the children of deployed members to a combat zone. Lester et al. (2010) examined the frequency and length of combat related deployments and found that anxiety was increased in children with currently deployed parents. Anxiety seemed no different in this study of children whose parent was currently on alert in the missile field. In the example discussed earlier, Dakota's anxiety was evident when he would "throw stuff...break something." He struggled with controlling his emotions. This is appropriate for this developmental stage as school-age children lack impulse control and are learning to express feelings such as anger and anxiety (Maholmes, 2012).

Lester et al. (2016) found that children 6-10 years of age were more likely to experience adjustment problems and anxiety. Children "develop the capacity for self-regulation and the ability to manage challenges across development" (pg. 17) through interactions with a caregiver. Consistent caregiving is required for healthy child development and parental absence creates significant concerns. Deployment exposure predicted "dysfunction in affective involvement, family communication, problem solving and family function" (pg. 17). Anxiety and family functioning is seen throughout years of research. This study proved the same. It is concerning to see this much anxiety in children so young and to cope with it daily within their military life. This is something that deserves more attention and further research. Children deserve proper resources and assistance to grow into healthy adolescents and adults.

The world for the military children in this study was perceived as somewhat restricted during their fathers' deployment, often lonely or scary, and anxiety producing. This is consistent with

previous research on children with a parent deployed to a combat related deployment. The ICBM mission is similar to the mission deployed to a combat zone in that the mission is cyclical and chronic with no end to the repetitive nature for the families. Children in this study all shared positive experiences regarding their relationship with their absent dad; it was evident that their interactions with him brought them joy, but time away from him brought them anxiety.

Child participants in the present study all lived with two parents, permitting few direct comparisons to studies of children of divorce. One similarity to studies of children of divorce was the example of Dakota, who stated he would get in trouble with aggressive behavior throwing objects. Even though this was negative, it resulted in increased attention from his dad. The negative attention Dakota would receive from being in trouble was different from children in divorce who displayed aggressive behavior, however they also experienced parental rejection. No similarities between military school-aged children and children of incarcerated parents were found. Children with incarcerated parents displayed more risky behaviors like drug use, truancy, and school failure. Military families have high standards, and behavior of these types are not tolerated even for family members and can leave the active duty parent in trouble or even separated from the military due to the behaviors of their children.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Military families in peacetime missions are under-explored. Researchers have not previously used phenomenology in the study of military children. I found phenomenology to be a valuable tool to gain access to military school-aged children's experiences. Researchers must continue using this and other qualitative methods in order to gain a greater understanding of our military children and their families. A limitation of this study was that all the children interviewed were from two-parent, opposite sex, families. There are many single parent military families, same sex

marriages, and blended families in the military, and their children should also be involved in future studies. All children discussed relationship dynamics that beg for research that should include both the children and their parents. Future studies should strive for larger and/or more diverse sample and multiple data collection sites over a broader geographical area. Life in North Dakota could have played a role in how children in this study perceived their world. Future research must include children from varying branches of the military. This study was specific to the Air Force, and all branches have some type of peace time mission. Only school-aged children ages 8 to 12 years were interviewed; future studies should consider a wider range of ages. Consideration should also be given to longitudinal research to see the effects of parental deployment over time. Additionally, further research is necessary to examine in greater depth the dynamics of parent-child relationships of military families and the stresses of mothers and other caregivers during the deployment of the other parent. Interventions to help these families cope are not presently evidence-based, so rigorous testing and follow-up are indicated.

### **Implications for Interventions with Children**

Military primary care providers are likely familiar with an understanding of behaviors in children of deployed members. However, many military children receive their care from civilian providers (Gorman, Matilda, & Hisle-Gorman, 2010). This makes the argument for greater awareness regarding the challenges of military life. Nurse Practitioners (NP) like myself are a large workforce seeing these children in clinic. It is imperative they have knowledge on how to teach and treat military children who are anxious and miss their parents who are deployed.

NPs and other pediatric providers require knowledge of how to screen the caregivers at home who are dealing with full time parenting and chaos while the other parent is deployed.

All providers should be culturally informed and have resources to deal with families with deployed members. Military children represent a growing number of children in the civilian sector who have given so much to their country, serving with their parents. They deserve to be understood within the context of their culture and helped to cope with the absence of their parents when the country requires it.

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## Appendices

## **Appendix A**

### **Minor Assent Document**

Project Title: Military Children's Perceptions of Parents' Frequent Missile Base Deployments

Investigator: Deborah Jones

I am doing a research study about what it is like when your mom or dad goes to the missile field for work. A research study is a way to learn more about people. If you decide that you want to be part of this study, you will be asked to tell what your life is like during one interview with me.

There are some things about this study you should know. If you decide to participate and anything upsets you then you don't have to answer any more questions, we can skip to another question or you can stop the interview. It will take you about 10-20 minutes to talk with me.

When I am finished with this study I will write a report about what was learned. This report will not include your name or that you were in the study. If you have any questions about this study you can ask me or your parents.

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. If you want to stop after we begin, that's okay too. I need 15-20 school-age children from 8 to 12 years of age for the study. Your parents know about the study.

After you answer some questions you will receive a gift.



If you decide you want to be in this study, please tell me that you will be in the study and sign your name.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, want to be in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_ (Sign your  
name here) (Date)

\_\_\_\_\_ (witness) \_\_\_\_\_ (PI Signature)

“Confidentiality”: “The Institutional Review Board of “Military Children’s Perceptions of Parents’ Frequent Missile Base Deployments”; the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, Bethesda, MD; and DoD may access records to ensure subject human protection (32 CFR 219.116 (a) (5)).”

## **Appendix B**

### **Parental Consent Document**

**PROJECT TITLE:** Military Children's Perceptions of Parents' Frequent Missile Base Deployments

**INTRODUCTION:** Your child has been invited to join a research study to explore what it is like to have a parent away from home and in the missile field every week. The purpose of this research study is to gain an understanding of the challenges children face when they have a parent away from home every week in support of the missile mission. Research on military children has often focused on children of parents deployed to a combat zone. However, there is a gap in our understanding of children with parents who have local deployments, such as those in the missile mission. It is my goal with this research study to offer children the opportunity to share their perceptions of their experiences.

Your child has been invited to participate because they meet the following inclusion criteria: your child is between age 8-12 years old at the time of the interview, has at least one parent assigned to the 91<sup>st</sup> Missile Wing that requires them to "deploy" to the missile site, deployment is 24-96 hours, parent has had at least 2 deployments in the last month, at least one parent provides written consent for the child to participate, the child provides "assent" to participate. Your child will not participate if they are unable to provide assent or they do not agree to participate.

Please take whatever time you need to discuss the study with your family and friends, or anyone else you wish. The decision to let your child participate, or not to participate, is up to you, along with agreement by your child.

**WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY?** Your child will be asked to meet with the Primary Investigator (PI) for one 10-20 minute interview and answer questions about what it is like to have a parent deployed locally in the field every week. A total of 15-20 children will be recruited for this study. You will also be asked demographic information about yourself, your family, and your child.

Your child's participation is voluntary and they can stop participating at any time during the interview. If your child stops he/she will not be punished in any way. If your child stops during the interview the recorded data collected up until the time your child withdraws will be included in the analysis portion of the research study if a parent provides permission.

**RISKS:** This study involves little risk over what your child might experience when telling friends about what it is like when their parent is away from home. It is rare but your child may get upset or emotional about a question. If your child experiences any unexpected emotional discomfort or is disturbed by any questions he/she will be able to see a psychologist/counselor.

**BENEFITS TO TAKING PART IN THE STUDY:** There are no direct benefits for your child's participation in this study. However, gaining an understanding of what it is like for a child when a parent is away from home in the missile field every week may provide information to develop children's programs and provide valuable information for health care providers.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Your child's name will not be used when data from this study are published. Every effort will be made to keep research records and other personal information confidential.

The following steps will be taken by the PI to keep information confidential, and to protect it from unauthorized disclosure, tampering, or damage. The PI will be the only one with access to your child's recorded interview. The recorded interview will be professionally transcribed by a transcriptionist who will sign a pledge of confidentiality before gaining access to the recorded interview. At the University of Tennessee, Knoxville where I attend, my dissertation committee and members of the interpretive phenomenology group will also have access to the transcribed interviews. The interpretive group consists of members that will help me analyze your child's interview transcript. They will sign statements agreeing to keep information about your child confidential.

“Complete confidentiality cannot be promised, particularly for military personnel, because information regarding potential UCMJ violations or concerns regarding fitness for duty may be reported to appropriate medical, law enforcement, or command authorities. Additionally, federal and state laws and regulations may require reporting information obtained during the interview to military or civilian authorities.”

**INCENTIVES:** Once your child finishes the interview he/she will receive a small gift. Even if your child does not complete the interview they will receive a small gift (values \$5).

**YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your child has the right not to participate at all or to leave the study at any time. Deciding not to participate or choosing to leave the study will not result in any penalty to your child, and it will not harm his/her relationship with me. If he/she leaves the study after start of the interview he/she will receive a gift.

**CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS?** The PI for this study is Deborah Jones. Call (865-368-1074) or email [deborah.jones@us.af.mil](mailto:deborah.jones@us.af.mil) (or her advisor, Dr. Sandra Thomas at [sthomas@utk.edu](mailto:sthomas@utk.edu)) if you have questions about the research study.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the UT Office of Research IRB Compliance Officer at [utkirb@utk.edu](mailto:utkirb@utk.edu) or (865) 974-7697.

**Permission for your Child to Participate in Research:** As parent or legal guardian, I authorize \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name) to participate in the research study described in this form.

Parent or Legal Guardian's Signature

Date Parent's Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Witness signature    date    PI Signature    date

\_\_\_\_\_

“Confidentiality”: “The Institutional Review Board of “Military Children’s Perceptions of Parents’ Frequent Missile Base Deployments”; the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, Bethesda, MD; and DoD may access records to ensure subject human protection (32 CFR 219.116 (a) (5)).”

## **Vita**

### **COL DEBORAH K. JONES**

Colonel Jones grew up in Wartburg, Tennessee. She graduated with her Bachelors of Science in Nursing from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and joined the Air Force by direct commission in 1993. She received her Masters of Science in Nursing in 2004 and her Post Master's Certificate for Pediatric Nurse Practitioner in 2011. Col Jones is the Chief, Medical Nursing Services at 959 Medical Group, 59 Medical Wing, Joint Base San Antonio-Ft Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas, San Antonio Military Medical Center (SAMMC). She is responsible for leading over 300 Army and Air Force officers, enlisted, and civilian staff. She directs nursing care on 4 inpatient medical units in Department of Defense's (DoD) largest level 1 trauma center. In this role she is responsible for training Army and Air Force nurses in the Clinical Nurse Transition Program and the Nurse Transition Program, as SAMMC is the DoD training platform for medical services. She plans, clarifies, defines practice standards and actions ensuring patient safety. Col Jones is also a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner and sees patients on occasion at Randolph Air Force Base, San Antonio, TX.